



[Main page](#) | [Archive](#)

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press contact: Hamlet Paoletti, 310/434-2317 (office) or 310/877-4686 (cell)

If you are not a member of the press, please write to us at nrdcinfo@nrdc.org or see our [contact page](#)

CA Coastal Commission Requires U.S. Navy to Use Common Sense Measures to Protect Marine Life When Practicing With Sonar Along California's Coast

Recognizes that Whales Don't Have to Die for Sea Exercises

LOS ANGELES (January 11, 2007) – By a vote of 8-1 after a public hearing yesterday in nearby Long Beach, the California Coastal Commission agreed to approve two years of proposed naval exercises off Southern California only if the U.S. Navy puts in place mitigation measures to protect marine mammals from potentially lethal effects of mid-frequency sonar. These exercises will take place in some of the most diverse and biologically rich waters off the continental United States — waters that host blue whales, humpbacks, gray whales, dolphins, porpoises and other sensitive and iconic California species.

This was the first time the Navy had sought the Commission's approval for mid-frequency sonar training, and the first time California has imposed safety conditions for such exercises.

"We don't have to choose between naval training and the protection of whales and other marine life," said Cara Horowitz, a project attorney with the Marine Mammals Program at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). "When held to sound standards, the Navy has shown again and again that it can train effectively while minimizing risk to the marine environment."

Whales around the world have been found dead or dying following encounters with mid-frequency military sonar. In 2004, the world's leading whale biologists examined the link between navy sonar and whale strandings and concluded that the evidence of sonar causation is "very convincing" and "overwhelming."

Among the requirements presented by the Coastal Commission to the Navy were: avoidance of key marine mammal habitat, such as the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and the gray whale migration route; a requirement to power down at nighttime and in other conditions of low visibility, when whales are hard to spot; and expanded safety zones around ships to keep from blasting nearby whales.

"Initiating these safeguards is perfectly in step with the commission's mandate to protect California's coastal waters," Horowitz said.

Although the Navy itself has acknowledged the lethal impacts of this technology, which floods vast areas of the ocean with ear-splitting subsurface noise, it had given the Commission no assurances it would take common-sense steps to protect marine life.

Last July, with ships of several nations off Hawaii, poised to begin one of the Navy's largest international training exercises, a federal judge in Los Angeles temporarily halted the use of mid-frequency sonar. The Navy was allowed to proceed with the exercises only when it agreed to take significant, common-sense measures to protect whales and other marine species, such as staying away from the newly designated Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument.

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 1.3 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Livingston, Montana, and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org

POPULAR ISSUES

Share Tweet 1,333

© Natural Resources Defense Council